following months, as compared to those in the corresponding months last year; and

(c) what further steps are contemplated towards converting SAARC region into an European/ASEAN economic community?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) During the Colombo Summit in July, 1998, an offer was made to all the SAARC member countries that India would be willing to consider bilateral Free Trade Agreements to accelerate the pace of trade liberalisation in the region. Positive response to this offer has been received only from Sri Lanka so far. Further, import restrictions maintained by India for BOP reasons on 2307 items have been removed for imports from the SAARC countries.

(b) After the Colombo Summit in July, 1998 the trade data available is only for August, 1998. This data indicate significant increase in imports from and exports to SAARC countries as compared to August, 1997.

(c) At present, there are no proposals under consideration for establishment of an economic community in South Asia.

Dumping of Fused Magnesia

7. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Andhra Pradesh Government has requested the Government to take steps for prevention of dumping of fused magnesia by China and to consider a provisional anti dumping duty in the context of sea water magnesia plant set-up by M/s. Birla Periclase Limited, Visakhapatnam; and

(b) if so, the measures taken to avoid irreparable damage to the above nascent industry?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) The Designated Authority appointed under the Customs Tariff Act and the Rules made thereunder is conducting anti-dumping investigations into alleged dumping of fused magnesia by China based on petition field by M/s. Birla Periclase Limited, Visakhapatnam. A Letter has also been received from the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in this regard. The Designated Authority has held an oral hearing and is in the process of announcing recommendations in the matters.

Export and Import of Onion

8. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the quantity of onion exported between April 98 and September 98;

(b) the quantity of onion imported, so far; and

(c) the quantity of onion proposed to be imported further dring the year?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Quantity of onions exported during 1998 is as under:

Month	Qty. In MTs
April	69735
May	56427
June	40674
July	27981
August	15316
Sept.	2539

(b) and (c) The import of Onions has been made free vide Notification No. 25(RE-98)/ 97-02 dated 15-10-98. NAFED has imported a total of 687 M.T. of onions during October-November, 1998. As per figures available with customs authorities, 5594 MT of onions have been imported after this item was put on the free list.

Export and Import Performance

9. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the export performance of the country vis-a-vis import during April-September, 1998;

(b) the rate of decline as compared to the corresponding period of the last year;